<u>Player-Centered Training</u> -- **Gary Allen** Field Session US Youth Soccer Boston 2012

Soccer is a free flowing game where the environment is constantly changing. As such it is truly a team sport that depends on the abilities and decisions of the players, both as individuals and in groups. Our role as coaches is to develop the abilities of, and encourage decisions by, the players to solve the problems each game presents.

We need to provide practice environments where realistic spaces, pressures and the principles of the game dictate the problems for the players, and, therefore, guide their decisions. Our methods should not be to choreograph or coerce players into pre-packaged decisions, rather they should present problems for players to solve, guide players in solving the problems and, perhaps most importantly, allow players to do so. Truly we should "guide" players in their own "discovery" of how to solve the problems the game presents with the tools at their disposal, and the problems we present should move on a sliding scale of simple to complex – both technically and tactically.

We speak of the 4 components of the game – technical, tactical, physical and psychological. We also speak of different aspects of players that affect their learning – cognitive, psychosocial (how they interact with others), and psychomotor (physical). We might be able to better understand this with three simple terms: Think, Relate, Move.

Sample Practice

General Technical Focus – receiving and 1st touch

General Tactical Focus – finding space to keep possession with a purpose

1. Warm-up -- 4 pairs of players and 4 window players – keep away

        -- Focus on individual technique, shape of runs to receive, body shape, body movement and space awareness

2. 4 v 4 + 4 windows

    –Technically it is more complex because of the opponents. But tactically it is fairly simple because there is no direction of play, so all of the real estate is valued the same by both teams

3. 5 v 5 +2 to four boxes

    – technically more challenging, but also more tactically complex because now there are specific areas worth more than others both to attack and to defend.

4. 6 v 6 to lines.

    -- more complexity for both

5. 6 v 6 to 3 goals and finally to 2 goals.